



Investigating Workplace Violence and Its Impact Among Transit Workers

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), Local 689 DC
Occupational Health Internship Program, 2023

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Who is ATU?



The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)

Largest labor union representing transit and allied workers in the US and Canada.



Membership

Comprises of more than 200,000 members including metropolitan, interstate; paratransit, light rail, subway, streetcar, and ferry boat operators; mechanics and other maintenance workers; station agents, and others.



Local 689 – ATU (AFL-CIO/CLC)

Comprises of more than 15000 members who work with WMATA , Fairfax Connector, DASH, DC Circulator, MetroAccess and many more



Agenda

Background and Objectives

Methodology

Results

Recommendations

Challenges and Successes



BACKGROUND

Understanding the issue at hand..

- v Transit workers face an array of challenges whilst at work.
- v Workplace stress is a significant concern amongst this population, arising due to recurrent violence, safety issues, job-demands, working conditions, among others.
- v Violence against transit workers is a prevalent factor in contributing to extreme levels of workplace stress and takes a toll on physical and mental well-being of workers.

Schedule screen at Montgomery County garage.



OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of our project is to understand from workers their perspectives on issues of violence and assaults.

Analyze and gain insights into instances of violence and assault affecting transit workers' wellbeing.

By doing so, we hope for a comprehensive plan geared towards mitigating the prevalence of such incidents.



Signature campaign to improve safety: Poster installed at Montgomery County

METHODOLOGY



Literature Review

A thorough comprehension of the context.



Preliminary visits

Engaging in on-site visits to establish rapport, facilitating informal group discussions, and conducting individual interviews.



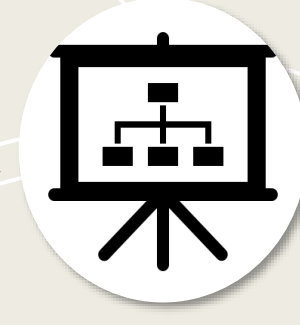
Survey Development and Pilot Surveys

Using field notes and important observations from workers to develop a comprehensive survey.



Data Collection

Incorporating feedback from pilot surveys and various stakeholders to optimize and enhance the relevance of the survey.



Data Analysis

Used statistical tools to explore and investigate various associations between variables of interest.



Recommendations

Suggest enhancements to policies, training, procedures, and overall measures to enhance transit workers' safety.

“No one should prepare for altercation at work”



“Verbal threats have become a norm in our daily lives”



“Driver’s shields are not there to protect you”

“Who helps who here”

“Courtesy stops is a ticking bomb, ready to explode”



“What is the point of calling transit?”

“People are out of control”



“It is like a zoo”

“Seatbelts are terrible”

“I have seen a lot as a bus operator”

Results: Demographics

The average age among participants was 48 years

Various occupations under transit
(top 4 responses) (N= 301)

Bus Operator	57.1%
Station Manager	1.3%
Bus Maintenance	12.2%
Railcar Maintenance	12.8%

Employers (N=301)

WMATA	76.6%
Fairfax Connector	13.0%
Downtown Area Short Hop (DASH)	7.7%
DC Circulator	1.3%
MetroAccess (paratransit)	1.3%

Gender Identity

Man	83.3%
Woman	16.1%
Other (Please specify)	0.7%

Marital Status

Married	51.0%
Not Married	35.2%
Separated or Divorced	10%
Widowed	1.3%
Prefer not to say	2.3%

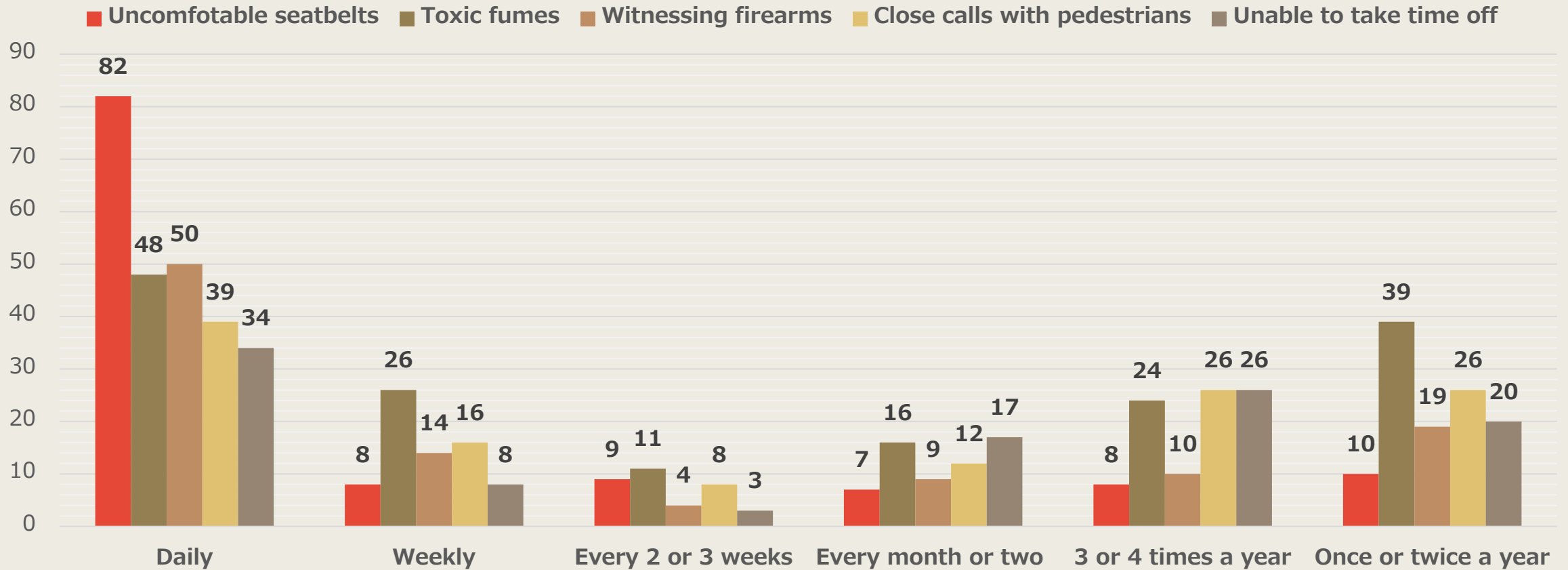
Number of persons dependents

2	20.6%
1	19.9%
3	17.4%

Sample Footer Text

Physical and Mental safety

Prevalence of various risks/hazards associated with physical and mental safety of transit workers (N=229)



Workplace violence

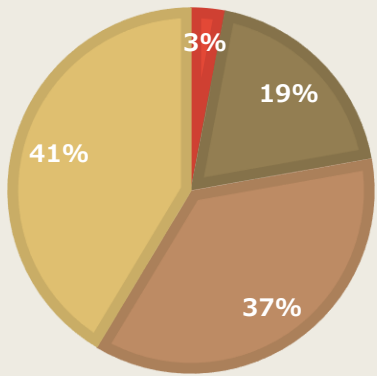
Prevalence of different forms of violence experiences amongst transit workers.

	Verbal threats (N=161)	Simple assaults (N=66)	Assault with weapons (N=29)	Stalking (N=24)	Unwanted or uncomfortable sexual experiences (N=47)
Bus operator	111 (68.9%)	49 (76.6%)	22 (75.9%)	19 (79.2%)	35 (75.4%)
Railcar maintenance	8 (5.1%)	3 (4.7%)	-	-	3 (6.4%)
Rail maintenance	7 (4.4%)	2 (3.1%)	1 (3.6%)	-	-
Bus maintenance	10 (6.3%)	1 (1.6%)	-	2 (8.3%)	-
Station Manager	13 (8.1%)	5 (7.8%)	5 (17.2%)	3 (12.5%)	5 (10.6%)
Rail/Train operator	6 (3.8%)	4 (6.3%)	1 (3.6%)	-	2 (4.3%)

Frequency of Assaults among Bus Operators

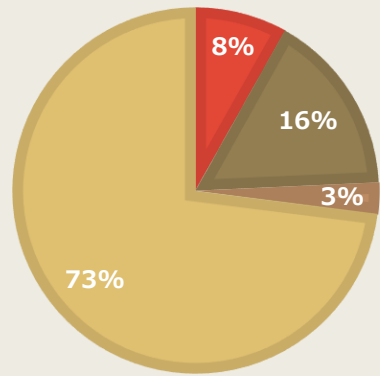
VERBAL THREATS

■ Never ■ Daily ■ Weekly ■ Monthly



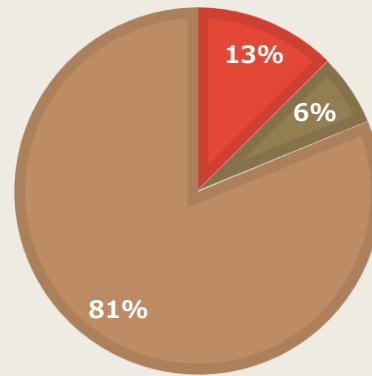
SIMPLE ASSAULTS

■ Never ■ Daily ■ Weekly ■ Monthly



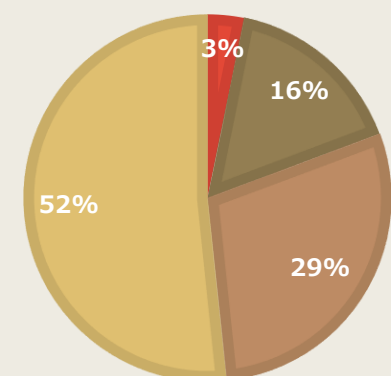
ASSAULT WITH A WEAPON

■ Never ■ Weekly ■ Monthly



UNWANTED OR UNCOMFORTABLE SEXUAL EXPERIENCES

■ Never ■ Daily ■ Weekly ■ Monthly



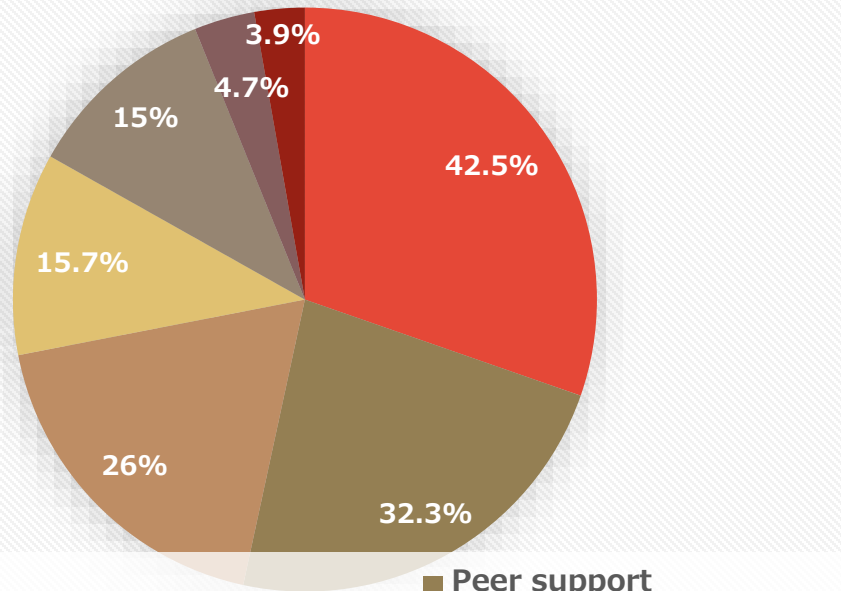
Mental health

Understanding the mental health impact of workplace stressors among transit workers

	Not relevant	Somewhat relevant	Relevant	Very relevant	Extremely relevant
Feeling stressed, nervous, or anxious.(N=262)	28.6%	23.3%	24.0%	8.8%	15.3%
Feeling emotionally drained or down.(N=263)	32.3%	24.0%	19.8%	11.4%	12.5%
Often feeling physically exhausted after experiencing workplace stress.(N=263)	33.5%	15.2%	21.7%	12.9%	16.7%
Often block disturbing thoughts about a past stressful experience on the job.(N=253)	35.6%	17.4%	20.9%	15.8%	10.3%
Often experiencing disturbed thoughts and feelings about a past stressful experience on the job.(N=251)	41.8%	21.9%	18.3%	8.4%	9.6%

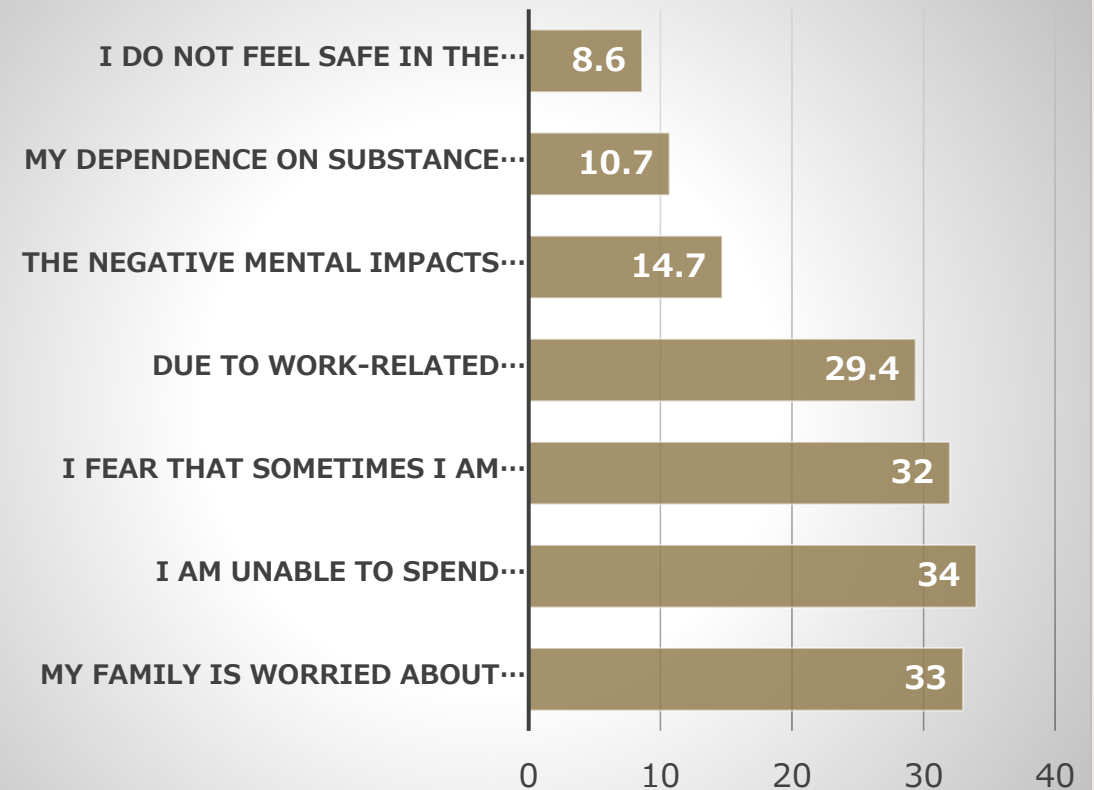
Mental Health

Resources used by those who reported experiencing mental health outcomes due to stress on the job.(N= 127)



- None
- Therapy
- Social events
- Mentorship programs
- Peer support
- EAP
- Work wellness programs

Impact of workplace stress on daily/family life.
(N=197)



Security, Policies, and Procedures

Bus Operators

	Disagree/Strongly disagree	Agree/Strongly agree
Allowing courtesy stops on route will lead to an increase in assaults on transit workers	41.0%	59.0%
In situations of assaults, I have received a timely response from transit police	66.9%	33.1%
I have been scolded/reprimanded by a supervisor after reporting incidents of workplace violence or assaults	81.0%	19.0%
During the time of emergencies, control/dispatch respond timely and promptly	57.9%	42.1%

Training

To assess whether enough effective training was administered to transit workers

	I feel adequately trained to do my job safely	Have you ever been assigned equipment or vehicles that you are not fully trained to operate?	I know what to do during emergencies in all of the vehicles and facilities where I work.	The de-escalation training prepared me to handle various real-life scenarios on the job.	There is enough time allotted for pre-trip inspections.	In the last 3 years have you received any refresher safety training?	I have been unfairly treated during my training (this could be because of any language barriers or impatience on part of trainers).
Yes	85%	28.3%	77.4%	55.8%	57.6%	81%	9.3%
No	15%	77.1%	22.6%	44.2%	42.4%	18.4%	90.7%

RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication related to reporting procedures.

Development of relevant training schedule based on the needs and concerns of the workers.

Improvement in the emergency response.

Focus on the mental well-being of transit workers.

Better ventilation systems within maintenance facilities

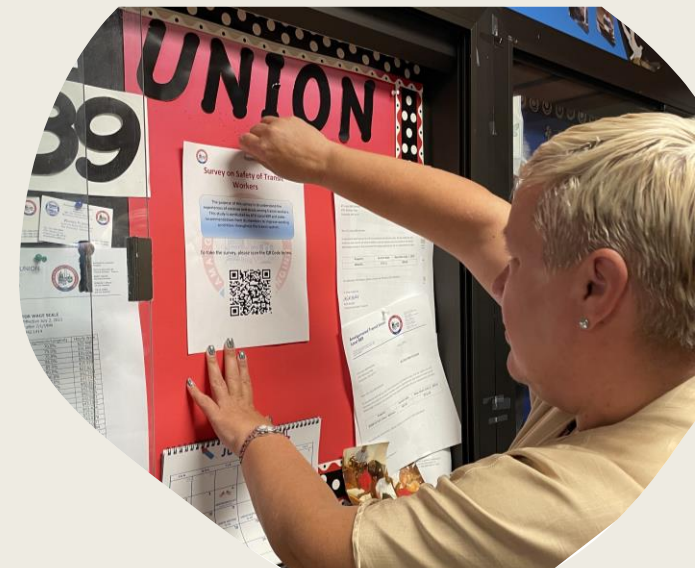
Introducing more practical and strategically timed breaks within routes, enabling operators to pause without feeling rushed or risking schedule delays.

“Reporting and talking with management is an extremely uncomfortable and unnerving situation. Some management constantly have a negative disposition when I go to them for issues.”

“ There needs to be some form of training on how to deal with those whom suffer from mental health illness.”

“ Police officers need to be more visible in EVERY station. Transit needs to ride the buses more often. Crime can happen anywhere and it's happening in the station and on the buses because the customers don't fear transit. “

“ I need to feel more safe when at work is a necessity. You can not function being unsafe and feeling unsafe. Knowing you are coming to war to a war zone and also feeling that if you need to take time off for your mental wellbeing, you can't because who even approves workman compensation “



Challenges

- ❖ Language Barriers
- ❖ Duration and verbiage of the survey
- ❖ Time constraints
- ❖ Survey mostly applicable to bus operators
- ❖ Mistrust among workers due to no changes in the transport system to make it a safer workplace.



Successes

- ❖ Collaboration with a labor union.
- ❖ Launching an online survey.
- ❖ Reaching out to sub-populations of transit workers and employers.
- ❖ Building culturally and socially relevant surveys through the support of the participants.

Personal reflection:

Engaging with diverse individuals was a rewarding experience. Conversations with workers provided valuable insights and knowledge and the process taught me about survey methodologies and the hurdles they can involve.

Personal reflection:

Collaborating with a labor union to conduct a community participatory project was a pivotal part of the internship. I learned, through the medium of formal and informal interactions with the transit workers, that there is a need to develop more needs-based contextually relevant training tools and procedures for transit workers.



Acknowledgements

Funding Support

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Professional Development/Organizational Support

ATU international

Local 689

AFL-CIO

Mentorship

Rebecca Reindel, Safety and Health Director, AFL-CIO

Russell Bateman, Training and Education Administrator, Amalgamated Transit Union

Community Support

Raymond Jackson – ATU Local 689 President and Business Agent

Theus Jones - Second Vice President & Safety Officer for Operations Maurice Womack - Safety Officer for Maintenance & Construction & ABA for Maintenance & Construction

John Gaines - ABA for WMATA Bus Operations & Private Sector

Jennifer Chase - ABA for Pay & Medical / OHAW

Glenn Miller - ABA for Maintenance & Construction

Alphonza Clements - ABA for Private Sector Bus Operations

Shameka Harris – Organizer

Ikea Bethea - Organizer

Damien Wood – Organizer

Tony Pollard - Organizer

To all the bus operators, rail car operators, maintenance and station managers, for your time.



Thank you

Looking forward to your feedback and questions